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## A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO THE ROMANIAN "DEASUPRA"

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**Abstract:** The paper presents various samples of the Romanian *deasupra* (above / over), which may contribute to a possible network of *deasupra* senses. The research is based on almost 1,000 samples taken from various printed and online mono- and bilingual dictionaries, newspaper articles, as well as literary works.

**Keywords:** adverb, preposition, prototype, network.

### Introduction

Although this preposition is not listed among the most important Romanian prepositions (GA, I, 1966: 334), such as *asupra* or *peste*, it is part of the Romanian *over* / *above* concept (Imre 2010).

The most important function of a preposition is to establish connection (GALR, I, 2005: 607), and as such, it is part of structure with three elements, being between two autonomous lexical terms. In the case of *deasupra* (over / above), the term following the preposition is always in the genitive case due to the nature of the preposition:

(1) *deasupra mesei* 'above the table'

The Romanian *deasupra* is the combination of *de* and *asupra*, and according to GALR (I, 2005: 624), the intrinsic sense of *deasupra* is superiority. However, the situation is not as simple, as we will try to argue.

*Deasupra* functions both as a preposition and as an adverb in present-day Romanian, and its function may be differentiated based on the context (GA, I, 1966: 319, 329; GALR, I, 2005: 585), as the examples below show:

(2) *deasupra casei* 'above the house' – preposition

(3) *șade deasupra* 'He is sitting over / above' – adverb

If we approach *deasupra* syntactically, it is easy to observe that a preposition asks for the presence of the associated term (GALR, I, 2005: 585):

(4) *Nu mai locuiește nimeni deasupra lor.* 'Nobody lives above them.'

whereas the term *lor* (them) is not present in the case of the adverb:

(5) *Nu mai locuiește nimeni deasupra.* 'Nobody lives upstairs.'

Thus we can conclude that the form of the preposition and adverb coincides in the case of the Romanian *deasupra* (GALR, I, 2005: 586). The cognitive approach to *deasupra* includes its description both as a preposition (connected to a noun) and as an adverb (connected to a verb).

### The notion of 'above'

Even the locative relationship of *higher* and *lower* is more complicated than it may seem. Stereotypically, we tend to think that this is a completely vertical relationship. On studying the English *above*-situation, Regier (1996: 84) presents interesting cases, stating that the first-cut characterizations of *above*, such as "the centre of mass of the trajectory is located higher in the visual field than the centre of mass of the landmark" is naive, supporting his argument with the

findings in perceptual psychology. According to this, humans viewing static scenes mentally represent the forces that are acting on the objects, keeping them where they are (Freyd, Pantzer and Cheng 1988). The results show that part of what *above* denotes is the possibility of the trajectory striking the landmark if it is allowed to fall under the influence of gravity:

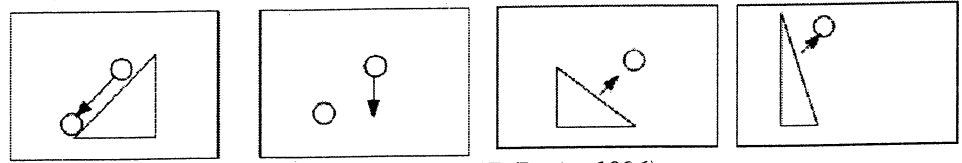


Figure 1. ABOVE (Regier 1996)

Regier (1996: 84) concludes that in order to describe the *above*-situation, we also need *proximal orientation* and *centre-of-mass orientation* of a scene. The proximal orientation is the orientation of the imaginary directed line segment connecting the landmark to the trajectory where the two objects are closest. The centre-of-mass orientation, on the other hand, is the orientation of the imaginary directed line segment connecting the centre of mass of the landmark to that of the trajector. We need proximal orientation, as we have an 'intuitive' notion that *above* is intimately related to upright vertical. It is also worth considering the degree of alignment between relational and reference orientations to approach the issue of the spatial orientation of two objects. The direction of potential motion describes potential motion of the trajectory, possibly toward the landmark, whereas the proximal and centre-of-mass orientations describe orientations originating at the landmark and headed towards the trajector:

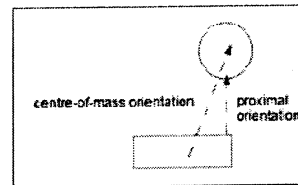


Figure 2. Orientations (Regier 1996)

If a trajectory above a landmark comes down to rest on it, the classification changes from *above* to *on*, which is similar in Romanian as well: if the trajectory touches the landmark, *deasupra* changes to *pe* (on). English is not sensitive to vertically or horizontally extended axis orientation of the landmark *above*, as Regier observes (1996: 135). In Romanian, although *deasupra* may change to *pe* in case of contact, we can still decide if we use *pe*, *deasupra* or *peste*, as in the examples below:

- (6) *Au pus cadavre peste cadavre*. Corpses were piled one *over* the other.
- (7) *Au pus o farfurie deasupra petei*. A plate was placed *over* the stain.
- (8) *Au pus o farfurie pe masă*. A plate was placed *on* the table.

The above cases clearly show that we need certain guidelines when to switch from one preposition to the other, as *contact* or *lack of contact* does not automatically result in the selection of a certain preposition or adverb (Imre 2010). Langacker (1999: 49) seems to focus only on the central, prototypical sense of *above*, which "requires for its scope at least enough spatial expanse to include its two participants and their divergent locations along the vertical axis."

Evans and Green (2006:253) warn us that in Rosch's categorisation the everyday process of categorisation is important, which – for instance –, basically differs from a biologist's point of view. However, we firmly believe that *deasupra* is predominantly used in non-scientific contexts, and we can agree with Rosch, when she identifies two principles regarding the human categorisation system (1977:429).

The first principle is cognitive economy, stating that an organism attempts to gain as much information as possible about its environment while minimising cognitive effort and resources. The second principle is perceived world structure, which means that humans rely upon correlational structure (e.g. the concept of *flying* and *feathers*, cf. Evans and Green 2006) in order to form and organise categories. People often have images of prototypical members of categories; Lakoff remarked (1987:446) that being a member of a culture requires individuals to have a large stock of conventional rich images (e.g. *English tea*).

From the cognitive point of view, categories are open-ended, relative, and an instance of a category depends on the purpose in using the category, as supported by many examples (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980:12, 122-123, 164).

### Defining *deasupra*

Dictionary definitions of *deasupra* (e.g. DEX 1998) primarily define it as establishing a locative relationship between two items, one of which is situated higher than the other in space, either functioning as an adverb or preposition. This sense is further completed by other senses, such as the upper part of something, on top of something, over something as if covering, or excess over a certain limit, which is usually expressed by the combination of two prepositions *pe* and *deasupra*.

Other prepositions also have at least one of these senses, so *deasupra* is often used as a partial synonym when *peste* (over), *prin* (through), or *asupra* (over) is involved.

Dominte defines *deasupra* as a prepositional adverb, rooted from *asupra*, whose spatial meaning weakened in the contemporary Romanian (1970: 254), and he does not describe it in terms of contact or lack of contact. What makes this word interesting is that – according to Dominte – its analysis is impossible, except for the fact that it is preceded by one of the auxiliary prepositions *de*, *pe*, *până* (1970: 258, footnote).

We could not be contented with its status assigned by Dominte, so much was our relief when discovering that Vasiliu's 1973 analysis touching a cognitive approach sets this prepositional adverb within the structure of spatial superiority, *with or without* contact. However, her definition does not set a single central sense, as the presence or the lack of contact between the trajectory and landmark seems to be important; when there is contact between them, it is common to visualize it with the help of *pe* (on). Within our system of senses, *S* stands for *trajectory*, whereas *C* refers to the landmark.

In order to map as many meanings of *deasupra* as possible, we have collected almost 1,000 cases in which *deasupra* appears either in its concrete or metaphorical sense. We started from the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary (DEX), but more dictionaries were also used both in their printed and online version. This was completed by various press cuttings and literary works of Liviu Rebreanu, a famous Romanian 20<sup>th</sup> century writer.

*Deasupra 3D / 2D, no contact*

Seemingly, the most central sense of the Romanian *deasupra* is the following scenario: stereotypically, a smaller thing (S) is above a bigger, usually horizontally extended thing (C), and there is no contact between the two items. The scenario comes into being by distancing from the 'ground' level, as the landmark (C) of the scenario is below, above which something is to be observed (S):

(9) *OZN surprins deasupra Aeroportului Henri Coandă*

UFO seen above Henri Coandă Airport, Romania (headline)

Both the English *above* and the Romanian *deasupra* are typically regarded as describing static scenes, as if one thing hanging above the other, but the examples show that we are faced with cases which may be either static or dynamic, depending on the verbs involved.

Concrete, basic meanings are easy to change into metaphorical extensions, we only need one of the constituents to be or to be understood as metaphoric. A typical way of metaphorization is the case when the capital city of a state stands for the whole country/ the citizens:

(10) *Cerul s-a desfăcut deasupra Moscovei.*

The sky split in two above Moscow.

At this stage we can remember Regier's findings, who demonstrated that the *above*-situation should not always be fully upright; a certain slant is often accepted:

(11) *Vecinii de deasupra noastră.* The neighbours above us.

A special case within this category is when *fire* is involved:

(12) *Ceaunul deasupra focului.* The cauldron over the fire.

Fuzziness is also to be observed as we think that this category establishes the link between *above with no contact* and *above with contact* cases, as the fire can touch the cauldron occasionally.

Further cases are, for instance when S is similar in size to C, or even larger than that; in these cases we can observe a certain *cover* aspect added to the basic meaning of *deasupra*, and S both covers and protects C without contact:

(13) *Baldachinul e purtat deasupra capului unui demnitar.*

The canopy is above the head of a superior.

As our entire physical being relies heavily on our bodily experience, it is natural to have come across many instances of *deasupra* related to the human body and its parts. The most often employed body parts connected to *deasupra* are the head (with eyes and lips), ankles, feet, knees and kidneys:

(14) *Mustața crește deasupra buzei superioare la bărbați.*

The moustache grows above the upper lip of men.

In many cases *deasupra* establishes a relationship between various parts of a building:

(15) *Lintoul este montat deasupra unei uși.*

The lintel is fixed above the door.

Special cases of *deasupra* were identified related to things written on a paper: mainly diacritical signs, accent marks above letters, or notes on a music sheet:

(16) *Accentul e semnul pus deasupra unei litere.*

The stress sign is placed above a letter.

A very interesting case is when the canonical viewpoint shifts to a vertical one, and the observer 'knows' that S is above C; in this case we can talk about a 90° turn, but the relationship between C and S is still *deasupra*, and an extra *cover* aspect becomes important:

- (17) *Lambrechinul e o draperie scurtă așezată deasupra unei ferestre.*

The lambrequin is a short curtain hung over a window.

In the side-viewed picture above C stands for the window and S is the curtain covering the window; typically, there is no contact between the two. This is similar to body parts and their covering clothes, but they are treated separately, as there is contact between them.

***Deasupra, contact, cover full / partial***

The most central case within this group is when there is contact between C and S, but C is canonically larger than S, which rests on C:

- (18) *Estrada e o platformă ridicată deasupra solului.*

The estrade is raised above the soil.

In further cases the size of S and C may seem irrelevant, although in special situations they overlap and cover may also become important:

- (19) *A așezat un obiect deasupra altuia.*

He placed one thing above the other.

In other cases *deasupra* is used to express that C is the supporting element for S above it; C is typically vertically extended, whereas S is horizontal:

- (20) *Piciorul de susținere pentru zidăria de deasupra...*

The supporting leg for the masonry above...

The cover aspect connected to *deasupra* has many sub-categories. Basically, we can distinguish two horizontally extended and covering layers (C and S), which are to be found all over in nature: on land (*snow covering lands*), water (*ice*) or in the air (heterosphere above homosphere):

- (21) *Stratul de oxizi metalici s-a format deasupra unei suduri.*

The metal-oxide layer formed over a weld.

If food is involved, we have something similar; cakes usually have a layer of chocolate or whipped cream on top for ornamental reasons, or when various types of food are ready, they are sprinkled with something, thus forming a partial cover:

- (22) *Fursecuri cu nucă deasupra*

Cookies sprinkled with nut (recipe)

Roofs and domes are special types of protective covers, as they do not horizontally cover the buildings (C), and they actually establish the link between *above/over* and *above/on*:

- (23) *Domul este cupola de deasupra unui edificiu monumental.*

The dome is the cupola over / above a monumental edifice.

When full cover is implied, the shape of C is basically round and S forms a protective circle around it, which is typical for various coils. Although – technically speaking – the strata around our Planet are positioned similarly, it is easy to guess why the notion of *sky* is the following:

- (24) *Cerul e ... deasupra pământului, ce pare a avea formă emisferică.*

The sky is... above the Earth, seemingly taking the shape of a hemisphere.

There are cases when we are conscious of the above-mentioned full or partial covers when these protective layers are removed. This is signalled by the use of special verbs: *a curăța* (peel), *a îndepărta* (remove), *a răscoli* (ransack):

- (25) *A îndepărtat coaja de deasupra.*

He removed the upper peel / skin.

***Deasupra above + in***

As water is a special entity, coming into contact with it may be possible by sinking into it or floating on it. As we all know, we actually swim in the water, but at the same time we are

partially above its surface as well. If S is completely on the surface of the water without being in it, then we change the verb: instead of *swim* we use *float*:

- (26) *Lebedele deasupra apei...*

The swans afloat...

#### **Deasupra $C_a + C_b$ or $C_1 + C_2$**

There are situations when the upper part of something differs from the rest, or it has a different name:

- (27) *Pupitrul e o masă mică având partea de deasupra înclinată.*

The lectern is a small table with an inclined upper part.

In this case  $C_a$  and  $C_b$  are parts of the same C, they contribute together to the function of C. This also involves that  $C_a$  and  $C_b$  are not interchangeable. However, there are situations when  $C_a$  and  $C_b$  are interchangeable, for instance when C has two (interchangeable) sides:  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ , which may be turned upside down or the inside out (180° turn):

- (28) *Dacă învărtim paie, partea umedă de la pământ ajunge deasupra.*

If we turn the straw over, the wet part comes above.

This case may be regarded as a certain type of reflexive sense, similar to the English *over* (cf. Lindner 1981).

#### **Deasupra limit**

A final *deasupra*-scenario establishes the link between concrete, basic, central, prototypical instances and their metaphorical extensions. In this case there are two separate entities somewhat next to each other and their vertical extension is compared. The result is that one of them (S) is usually taller than the other:

- (29) *Coloana este partea dintr-un catarg care iese deasupra punții.*

The column is part of a mast hanging over the deck.

#### **Conclusions**

One could observe that while describing *deasupra*, the examples were partially taken from dictionary definitions. The basic difference between *deasupra*-cases in dictionaries and the ones used in press is that the former ones are predominantly concrete, used in basic meanings, whereas the samples from online sources and press cuttings contain more metaphorical extensions. We have searched for sentences containing *deasupra* in the works of Liviu Rebreanu, a famous Romanian novelist as well, expecting much more metaphorical cases; out of 259 findings 'only' 25 were metaphorical ones (about 10%).

On the whole, we have looked through 924 cases, out of which more than two-thirds were used in concrete, basic senses. non-metaphoric usages of *deasupra*. We are far from thinking that we were able to detect all the situations in which *deasupra* may appear; in fact, we even aggravated the situation by the fact that *deasupra* is interchangeable with *peste*, *prin*, or *asupra*. A systematic comparison requires a further study, in which *pe* is also involved, let alone translation problems regarding prepositions / adverbs of a similar cognitive map (cf. the English *over*, *above*, *beyond*, or the Hungarian *felett*, *fölül*).

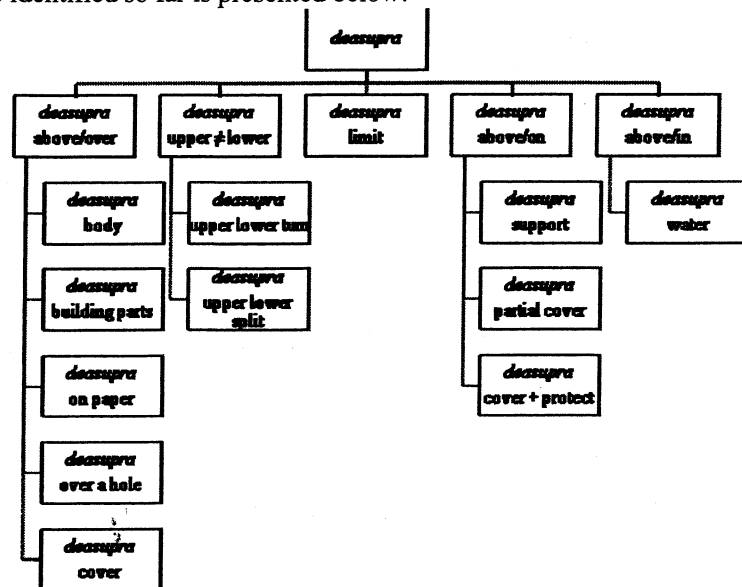
Contrastive studies may offer an important insight into the system of the language on the one hand, and on the other hand it may help a correct use of the Romanian *deasupra*, even when antonym senses are taken into consideration; *deasupra* may be also explained as 'not *dedesubt*' (below/under). Consider the following examples:

- (30) *S-a aplecat deasupra bebelușului.* He bent over the baby.

- (31) *S-a aplecat peste birou.* He bent over the desk (to reach something).

Although the number of cases without contact is more than double the number of cases without contact, there are enough instances with contact to state that the Romanian *deasupra*

refers to both *above+over* and *above+on* cases as well. This is completed by those cases when an active 'upper' part of C is involved in a *deasupra* relationship. A possible network of *deasupra* senses identified so far is presented below:



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